Interview with Robert E. White

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ROBERT E. WHITE

Interviewed by: Bill Knight

Initial interview date: June 10, 1992

Q: Bob, the floor is yours to cover anything clearance didn't cover. You might want to start out with a thumbnail sketch of your overall career.

WHITE: Well, I entered the Foreign Service in 1955 and served a couple of early tours in IO, in Hong Kong, in Canada. But I think my career really began when I went into the Latin American Bureau.

Q: What years are you talking about there?

WHITE: 1962 to 1981. Almost 20 years of having to do with things mainly Latin American. Of course, when you and I were young in the Service, FSOs gravitated away from involvement in Latin America because the relationship was one of a metropole power to a dependent government. The issues were simple, there were no complexity, not much challenge. Fidel Castro changed all that. Then came the Kennedy response—the Alliance for Progress. Part of the Kennedy approach to any problem was to go out and recruit talent. And so Ed Martin, a most important person and much underestimated. He made important contributions to policy. As Assistant Secretary for Latin America, Ed consciously reached out throughout the State Department to bring in new people to ARA.

I, for example, was offered a job two ranks above what my grade would have entitled me to go to Latin America.

Well, my career followed a normal progression. In 1962, I went to Ecuador as deputy principal officer in Consulate General Guayaquil.

Q: I loved Ecuador. I inspected there. It's a great place.

WHITE: Ecuador was a sort of microcosm of all the problems of Latin America.

And then in 1965 Kennedy Crockett, who was office director for Central America and the Caribbean, offered me three posts as chief of the political section—Haiti, the Dominican Republic or Honduras. I chose the Dominican Republic because I felt that something exciting was going to happen in the Dominican Republic. There were a lot of rumors. Well, I proved to be right. I went in a few days after the Marines in the invasion of 1965. I was not sympathetic to the invasion but as long as it took place I was glad that I was there because I learned a lot about how we became involved in this. Where the rights and wrongs were. How you worked with the military under conditions such as this. I think frankly we would have been far better off, everyone would have been far better off, had we never gone into the Dominican Republic, had we allowed the reform group headed by Francisco Caamano to take over. But in this particular case, because of Ellsworth Bunker's insistence on finishing a job, he spent the next two years of his life involved with the Dominican Republic and making certain that things came out more or less as well as they could have come out. A free election was held and a return to democracy that has never been interrupted took place. Now I obviously don't have too stringent standards when it comes to democracy because there are serious defects in Dominican democracy but at least you have had a steady succession of elected presidents.

Q: Who was the ambassador then?

WHITE: The ambassador then was Tapley Bennett. Ambassador Bennett was most kind to me and would invite me, as the junior officer present, when people like Cyrus Vance or McGeorge Bundy or other high ranking officials came in. So I was exposed to policy making and negotiations at a reasonably high level. But by the time they finished restructuring the embassy in Santo Domingo instead of being the chief of the political section I would have been, I think, second from the bottom. They were going to have six or seven political officers. So I just went to Ambassador Bennett and said: “Look, this is not really what I had in mind and I don't know who all these political officers are going to talk to anyway.” So I was able to salvage the job in Honduras, which had not yet been awarded to anyone.

Q: So this was just a few months later?

WHITE: Right. Two months later, I ended up in Honduras. I worked for a highly-skilled career ambassador, John Jova. Honduras at that time was not any kind of a priority in Latin America. One thing I do remember of interest...someone farsighted sent a team of foreign policy experts to judge what were the stakes in Central America? How seriously should we view insurgent movements in Central America? I remember that Tony Ross, a capable Foreign Service officer, was on that commission. Basically they came to the conclusion that except for the Panama Canal very little was really at stake in Central America. If I recollect correctly, they pointed out that there had to be social and political change in Central America; those societies had to move from one level of political development to another and that violence might accompany these changes but that this internal friction was not anything that the United States should get too excited about. I personally agreed with that assessment so I guess that's why I recall it. Of course, 15 years later, we were acting as though our world was coming apart because a U.S.-supported dictator in Nicaragua had fallen.

I served in Honduras from 1965 to 1968. Then I took an unusual step and became first deputy director for Peace Corps programs in Latin America and then director.

Q: You actually went out and tried for that position and got it?

WHITE: No, but I had always thought that the Peace Corps was a good idea. I enjoyed meeting with the Peace Corps volunteers. I enjoyed doing the periodic briefings. I thought the Peace Corps was very suspicious about the embassies and made rules so there shouldn't be any sort of intelligence gathering from Peace Corps volunteers, it was really in a sense the other way around. If Peace Corps volunteers were impressed with you and thought you knew what was going on in a country, basically they would take the initiative and come to you and tell you what was going on in their neighborhood, in their town, in their region and sort of check to see if their embassy had any idea of what was going on in the country...to find out if we really understood the political actors and the movements that were going on. I always found that reality check useful.

The Department of State with AID, started a program to identify young leaders of Latin America and send them to Loyola University in New Orleans for a three month leadership training program. It was a good program and we took it seriously and sent really good people up there. What really hurt, 10, 15, 20 years later, these leaders were classified as enemies of the United States' and were denied visas because they sided with nationalist movements in their countries.

Q: These were foreigners, not Peace Corps volunteers?

WHITE: Yes. The Loyola program came to mind in connection with the Peace Corps because frequently the Peace Corps volunteers would say “There is a particularly impressive young labor leader in my region” or “there is an impressive person just moving into a political position...”, perhaps as mayor of a town. So we would nominate that leader and send him up to the training program. Had the United States continued to follow

the relatively enlightened policies we had under Kennedy I'm convinced these people would have contributed to an unfolding of a modern history of Central America that would have proved quite different. But we acted in such a way, particularly under the Reagan administration, so as to force these people to the other side of the fence.

In 1972, I left the Peace Corps and went to Nicaragua as Deputy Chief of Mission. I left the Peace Corps because I received a call from the White House, from Dwight Chapin, I had to fire five or six people in order to make room for Republican political appointees. There had already been rumors about this, and I said: “Look, I'm not going to do that.” I went to see John Crimmins, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, who responded in what I thought was a totally admirable way. He said, “You did the right thing. I don't have any office directorships open. You'll be a DCM in the morning.” And so I ended up in Nicaragua.

Unfortunately, I ended up as DCM to an ambassador who was arguably the worst ambassador we've ever sent to Latin America up until that time. His name was Turner B. Shelton. He became a total acolyte of the Somoza dictatorship. This left me in a rather unusual role.

Q: He's the one who kept the refugees out of the embassy at the time of the earthquake?

WHITE: Right. It was one disaster after another. Just to give one example, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. When Somoza had him assassinated in 1978 or '79, that provided the flashpoint for the Sandinista revolution. This was a man of such fame, for his total integrity and patriotism that his violent death brought all the disparate groups together in Nicaragua and that event, more than anything else, ended the Somoza dynasty. There was a running battle between Somoza and Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, who was the editor and publisher of La Prensa, the most powerful newspaper perhaps in Central America at that time. He (Somoza) had made a remark that could have been interpreted by his zealous supporters as a license to do away with Pedro Joaquin and I suggested to the ambassador that

there should be some public way of identifying with Chamorro in order to extend some protection over this person who was playing a remarkably positive and pro-democratic role. He refused out of fear of offending President Somoza. I called up Pedro Joaquin and said I think we should have lunch in some public place very soon. He said: “I have already eaten lunch but I will come and have a second lunch with you.” So we went to probably the most popular restaurant in Managua and put ourselves on display. The United States presence was so powerful that even having lunch with the DCM served as some measure of protection and Pedro Joaquin Chamorro understood this gesture and was pleased with it.

Q: Did you have any feeling that Shelton's attitude to these things was under instruction from Washington?

WHITE: Not in the normal sense of instructions. Turner B. Shelton had been a USIA officer. He had come into USIA because during the war he was the liaison between the motion picture industry and the U.S. government. When Edward R. Murrow came in to head the agency he somehow effected the transfer of Shelton to the State Department. The State Department had real problems with Shelton and he was on the selection out list. But he had been DCM in Budapest. After Richard Nixon was defeated as governor of California, he went on a trip to Europe. All of the ambassadors and charg#s had something else to do when Richard Nixon called and wanted to come in and speak to the ambassador. But not Shelton, as he recounted to me many times. They talked until three in the morning, and had a couple of days together. This connection obviously served him well. During my time there, Howard Hughes was ejected from the Bahamas and came to Nicaragua. The Secretary of Commerce came down and cleared the way for him to be there. So, yes, my impression is that the Nixon White House felt very close to Somoza. And, while Shelton, if anything, went against the official instructions of the State Department, I think he had good solid backing for the way he conducted himself in Nicaragua.

Scandal piled on scandal. For example, AID funds were being diverted into the pockets of the Somoza clan. The Vice President, even though he was a loyal Liberal, and a friend of Somoza through his father, had a large family and his kids were being influenced by the Sandinistas and particularly by the church, he was worried about the future of his country. And he was, within reasonably tolerant limits, an honorable person. He and I would meet and he would tell me where the stolen funds were going, how they were being siphoned off, and I would report this. The ambassador found out who was telling me this and told President Somoza. It's a wonder that they didn't kill the fellow. He was fired as vice president. This was, to me, the last straw. I wrote a letter to Charlie Myers and John Crimmins in the ARA front office, a private letter, no copies, and it went all the way up to U. Alexis Johnson, who was famous for being Nixon's favorite career Foreign Service officer. He too was outraged and he wrote in the margin “Let us get rid of this man!”— meaning Shelton. But even he wasn't powerful enough to do it.

Q: How long were you in Nicaragua?

WHITE: Two years. 1970 to 1972.

Q: Was your personal relationship with Turner B. Shelton a tempestuous one?

WHITE: Well, it had its problems. Yes, it had a lot of problems. It was really a quite good embassy with solid professional people and a political AID director, Bill Haynes, who was really excellent. A Republican from Texas. A man who really ran the mission well. Yet, it is impossible to keep an embassy running in a professional way if everybody isn't doing their job and telling the truth and having frank exchanges. So with Turner B. Shelton my insistence that the embassy report the repressive features of the Somoza regime, about the corruption, about all these different problems we had with the Somoza government, resulted in real tensions within the embassy.

In fact, after I wrote that letter I referred to, I got a call from John Crimmins saying, “Look, we believe all that is going to happen to you if you stay there is that you are going to get badly hurt. Therefore we are going to pull you out of there and send someone else. There's no way we effectively can do the work the Foreign Service is supposed to do as long as he is there. So we are not going to worry about Nicaragua for a while.”

The Department then transferred me to Colombia, a bigger post. I was in Colombia from 1972 to 1975. Bogota was a reasonably traditional post, the only traditional post I ever had. You know, where you send a note to the Foreign Office and you get a note back. After about a year in Bogota, Ambassador Leonard Saccio resigned, Watergate hit and I was charg# for a year. So that was fun. I enjoyed it.

Pete Vaky then became ambassador in 1975—a most capable officer. We worked well together. Bill Rogers, who was then Assistant Secretary for Latin America, said he wanted to do something with the Organization of American States and asked me to become Deputy representative to the OAS. That was a useful and interesting assignment but nothing all that remarkable happened.

When the Carter administration came in I was made ambassador to Paraguay. I was in Paraguay from '77 to '79. That was a fascinating tour because the human rights policy was given great emphasis under President Carter. If there was ever a country that needed some pressure on human rights it was the government of Alfredo Stroessner.

There was some truly wonderful and exciting things that happened as a result of the Carter human rights policy and the way we applied it in Paraguay. Far too many incidents to recount.

Q: Please give us some examples of the kinds of things that were done.

WHITE: Two incidents. The first involved a prominent opposition politician, Domingo Laino, who went to Washington in 1978 under a grant from the State Department. While he

was there the Acting Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, received him and he told Secretary Christopher and the press that Paraguay was a repressive dictatorship that violated human rights. This action violated the rules of the Stroessner regime which said that one could, within limits, criticize the government inside Paraguay. But on the outside, and particularly in Washington, that was forbidden. So when he came back he was only home a day when the military kidnaped him. I sent an urgent telegram to the Department and I got instructions saying this is totally unacceptable. So, under instructions, I spoke to the Foreign Minister who adopted the line that even in the best regulated countries robberies, murders and kidnappings take place and that the government had absolutely nothing to do with this. Of course, everyone knew better. So the opposition came in to see me and said that the government intended to kill Laino. I said I didn't know exactly how to handle this but that I would go that evening to call on Domingo Laino's family, and if you want to tell anyone that I'm going to be there, that's fine. So I went and the next day all of the newspapers had photographs of me with the Laino family. I was in effect giving condolences on the disappearance and in effect expressing concern.

The next day I got a rocket from the Foreign Ministry. The Foreign Minister told me I was interfering in the internal affairs of Paraguay. I said the obvious thing: that, as the government bore no responsibility for this incident, it was just one friend calling on another friend and expressing concern. But I then handed over a very stiff note from the State Department. I said you have to understand that nobody in Washington believes the government's disclaimers and unless Domingo Laino reappeared rapidly and unharmed, there were going to be serious consequences for relations with the United States.

Later on, according to people within the government who became friends, it became clear that this was only the second time that Stroessner had ever reversed himself. The death warrant of Domingo Laino had already been signed. He's now the vice president of the senate and a leading candidate for the presidency—a leader I am proud to say who had a good experience with United States officials.

The Stroessner regime was in essence a military mafia. Shortly after the Laino incident a group of campesino and labor leaders met in a rural monastery—a perfectly legal, peaceful get together. The military came in and tortured them and threw them in prison.

I recommended in a telegram to the Department that we take a very serious view of this outrage. I recommended that we consider taking the AIFLD (American Institute for Free Labor Development) office out of the country. I recommended that an AIFLD team come down and that the probable result should be to move out the AIFLD. entirely.

Well, there was nothing that could have galvanized the AIFLD. like the prospect they would lose a country office. Within two days the head of AIFLD and a high level group from the AFL/CIO came to Paraguay. We mounted a serious and effective effort and in the end all of these labor and campesino leaders were tried and found innocent and the soldiers who were guilty of the torture were given a minimal slap on the wrist. In the context of Stroessner's Paraguay this was heady stuff.

There was a steady series of encounters with the Stroessner regime that resulted in a great improvement in the human rights situation—to the point that Paraguayans refer to this time as the “Paraguayan Spring” when they had an umbrella of U.S. and international human rights concern.

One of the things I tried to do, with considerable success, was to involve Europeans in this effort. I had regular meetings with the European ambassadors to discuss the human rights situation and what we could do about it.

Q: Before we move on, what happened on some of these issues?

WHITE: Well, what happened was a continuing struggle by the opposition to change the Paraguayan reality. Every ambassador that succeeded me took a strong stand against human rights abuses. I think this was one of the real strengths—the fact that there was consistency in U.S. policy. I think, through four ambassadors. Finally, in 1989, I believe,

Stroessner was ousted by his own people. A transitional president came in and, in effect, the whole Paraguayan political system has since been overhauled, democratized. They'll have their first serious contested election for the presidency next year. But for the last few years there have been no serious violations of human rights. There have been some problems over the rights of peasants and their land but otherwise a steady improvement in the human rights picture.

Well, my last post was El Salvador. I was only there a year from February of '80 to February of '81. Here was a situation where the United States was looking at El Salvador through the prism of the Cold War and the contribution of the Salvadorans was supposed to be tranquil while we fought the good fight with the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, Salvadorans had really suffered enough. The ruling cliques in El Salvador were as blind and as short sighted and as intransigent as any I've come across. So there was a revolution in swing.

Q: It was already going on?

WHITE: It was basically just getting started. My honest belief is that had we taken advantage of the changes—the so-called October 1979 change of government—had we been bolder, had we been more true to our principles then the revolution might well have been avoided. But the United States government in its foreign policy had never been accused of being a monolith. The differences between the Pentagon, the CIA, and the State Department were important differences, that were reflected in the embassy when I arrived.

When I went to El Salvador, everyone including the CIA said I would be back in two or three months. They said the end was inevitable, that the revolutionaries were going to take over. I just didn't believe that. Remember, I had served two tours in Central America, and I had been back in Central America when I was in the Peace Corps and as deputy representative to the OAS. I probably knew Central America as well as anyone else in the

Service. I always believed that there was a negotiated solution to be had. Indeed, I think the Carter emphasis on human rights, on agricultural reform and other reforms and on negotiations could have avoided most of the killing entirely. And I think that in the short time I had there, we were moving importantly in that direction.

The Reagan administration then came in and reversed those three facets of our policy with the result that, instead of emphasizing human rights, Alexander Haig said that counter-terrorism would replace human rights as a priority in U.S. foreign policy. Instead of an emphasis on reform, President Reagan said that reform would have to wait until after victory. And, instead of negotiation, we installed a policy to prevail on the battlefield. We turned this thing into a war. And I have to tell you that 75,000 tortured and dead people later basically the deal we could have had in 1980 but with the immense suffering that we visited on all these people in that decade.

So I left the Foreign Service over a real issue. The Salvadoran military had consistently tortured and killed people and lied to us about it. And we knew they were lying. We knew who was responsible. We reported to the Department who was responsible for it. Most of the killings occurred in the period between the election of Ronald Reagan as president and prior to his taking office.

We reported all that was going on. I reported that the military had killed the American church women. The military set up a commission at our insistence to investigate the deaths. The commission proved to be a mechanism to protect the military rather than to investigate. I received a telephone call from the Deputy Assistant Secretary just at the transition time—after the Reagan administration had taken office and after Secretary Haig had been named but before he had been confirmed—saying there was a problem that they were going to have difficulty getting military assistance to El Salvador through the Congress unless we could certify that progress was being made on the investigation into the nuns case. “We've got this problem,” said John Bushnell, then Deputy Assistant Secretary. I said, “Well, I can see the Department has a problem, but I have to tell you that

I don't have a problem because the problem simply is that I give you the facts...I report to you what has happened."

Well, it turned out that Bushnell really wanted me to say in a telegram that things were getting better. I said, "You know John, I don't really need a job that badly. I cannot say that because they are not getting better, they are getting worse. What's more, unless you take a stand on this, the killing is going to increase. You are going to have case after case after case of torture and murder of everyone who is against the military."

So over that issue, I went out of the Foreign Service. Frankly it was not a bad issue to go out on. It is always possible to stick around, but I felt this was something that was important and so I left.

Q: Did they yank you?

WHITE: Secretary Haig called me to Washington and he complimented me on the job I had done—particularly on the reporting. He then said, "We are making some changes, one of the places we are going to make changes is in El Salvador." I said I understood that. So we were sort of winding down the interview and he said, "By the way, I don't want you to speak to the press." And I said, "Mr. Secretary, I have no intention of speaking to the press, but as long as you bring it up you can transfer me but you really can't fire me. You can but you shouldn't. You were kind enough to tell me that I had done an outstanding job. Therefore it seems to me that at the same time you announce my leaving El Salvador, you should announce my new position."

He said, "Well, we really don't have ourselves altogether sufficiently for that." I said, "Well, it seems to me you've got at least sixteen, eighteen, twenty openings. Send me away from Latin America, send me away from human rights considerations," I said, "if you transfer me as Ambassador to Sweden or some place like that, then I can certainly accept that. Nobody elected me to anything. You are the people who are in charge. But if you fire me, what then you are proclaiming to the world is that I deserve to be fired for some reason

and am not being given an onward assignment." Secretary Haig said he understood my position, and would see what could be done.

So we had several more conversations at various levels. I'm not sure whether Secretary Haig tried. They claimed he did. They said they were having trouble with Senator Helms who wanted me punished.

I said, "I am not asking the impossible. If you want to make me Consul General in Hong Kong or Consul General in Berlin, something like that, fine. I am not asking you to pay a big price. I want to be reasonable, but I simply insist that I be treated with respect." It soon became clear to me that nothing was going to happen. They wanted me to go into the Inspection Corps. I said I really wouldn't do that and so I went out of the Foreign Service the same way George Kennan went out: Under the provision that if you are not offered a position or assignment of equal rank you are automatically retired.

Q: Would you want to comment on the nature of the points of contact you had in week-in, week- out operations in the field as ambassador...which levels of the Department were your effective points of contact?

WHITE: You raise an important point. The Department of State has never organized itself properly to deal with the field. The last person I can remember who really took the field seriously and knew how to move things through and how to relate at the proper level was John Crimmins. I think that the demands on the Assistant Secretary have become so great that unless a country is in crisis there is almost never this kind of contact. When I was charg# in Bogota, every once in a while Assistant Secretary Harry Shlaudeman would call and we would chat and that helped you feel you were connected, but normally I would relate to the office director. I think very highly of Shlaudeman, for technical proficiency. I suppose he's one of the really important figures that the Foreign Service has produced.

In Paraguay, there wasn't all that interest and properly so. It is a small, out of the way country. On the other hand, I have to say that the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary

were very interested that the human rights policies worked in that country. That there was measurable progress. The reports that came out of Embassy Asuncion demonstrated that if you applied human rights in an intelligent, sensible way you got results. I had trouble with AID because I said we should cancel the AID program in Paraguay. It serves no purpose in a corrupt country like Paraguay except to demonstrate to the people that we are supporting the regime. The money is largely stolen or wasted. I realized then how you come up against an entrenched bureaucracy. There was deep anger at my advocating an end to assistance programs.

In El Salvador, I heard regularly from Bill Bowdler and from Jim Cheek, the Deputy Assistant Secretary. By then El Salvador was a major issue and there were some differences between the Department and me. On occasion I would refuse to take instructions on the telephone because I knew that they couldn't get those instructions cleared. I said, “I don't agree with this but if you want me to carry it out then you send it to me in writing.” I would actually call Pat Derian, the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, and say, “There are instructions brewing for me to do this. I want you to look very carefully at whether this is going to advance our policy.”

At some point, I'd even call David Aaron, the Deputy Director of the National Security Council. He was a former Foreign Service officer who had worked with me in Ecuador. If I really needed clout on an issue I could count on David.

The point I am making is that carrying out the diplomatic mission in El Salvador would have been relatively simple had we had a united policy and a coherent foreign policy establishment in Washington. Instead you had the Agency with one policy, the Pentagon with another, and the State Department with a third. By this time the Carter administration had lost a lot of its coherence, a lot of its ideals and basically was concentrating on how to get reelected. I have to tell you, it was not a happy time to be representing the United States.

One thing I admire about the Reagan administration was their ability to put coherence into foreign policy even though I thought their policy was totally wrong headed. At least there was no doubt about what the policy was.

(extended discussion of John Ferch, former Ambassador to Honduras, who ran afoul of Elliott Abrams for refusing to follow orders and was forced to resign in circumstances similar to Robert White's case.)

Q: John Ferch made somewhat the same comment in his final battle with Elliott Abrams?

WHITE: Well, the case was a less dramatic case than mine in a sense but equally...

Q: But it seemed closely parallel?

WHITE: I agree. There was a great parallel...

Q: Because Abrams wanted him to do something on the basis of oral instruction and John said no, you've got to put it in writing. And Abrams took this as indication of disloyalty to the policy and yanked him out.

WHITE: Exactly. John thought that he was ambassador to Honduras and Elliott Abrams insisted he was ambassador to the Contras Congress—irreconcilable jobs. I would recommend that really, just my closing thought: if you want to have a professional Foreign Service, you are really going to have to shape up and stand behind Foreign Service officers when they get put in the position that John or Frank McNeil were put in for doing their jobs. Elliott Abrams was running a conspiracy. He was violating the laws of the country and where was the Foreign Service Association? Where were the people that were supposed to protect people who were not doing anything other than complying with the ethics of the profession. Stating what the facts were. Reporting. Or refusing to take Elliott Abrams' bizarre interpretations of U.S. foreign policy over the telephone. It is

just outrageous that Ferch should have been put in that position. The Foreign Service Association and others were totally silent as far as I could tell on this issue.

Q: Do we need some kind of prestigious senior counsel of the Foreign Service, presumably a retired officer, to deal with such cases?

WHITE: I agree—an ombudsman committee. Because had the Foreign Service had the courage they could have played a tremendously important role. You wouldn't have to confine it to Foreign Service officers but include retired officers and former Secretaries of State, whatever. It just was totally wrong—to order an ambassador, a professional Foreign Service officer, to be fired for doing nothing more than holding to the ethics of the profession. I found that difficult to reconcile with a professional service. And frankly I believe the Foreign Service will continue to pay dearly for this lack of courage.

Q: Is it possible that the whole NSC structure is becoming sort of an alternate Foreign Service, the policy making part of it?

WHITE: I think the fatal mistake was made by Kennedy. He did a lot of wonderful things. Actually, it was Eisenhower who put the NSC in place. I have always felt that the President should take the Secretary of State and his immediate group, plus the geographic bureaus —the office directors, the desk officers—and put them in the old State, War and Navy building, and make that the essence of the State Department. Propinquity is power. The reason the National Security Council is powerful is because of its physical location, which is practically in the White House.

Put the State Department in there and let the State Department play this coordinating role which is what the NSC is supposed to play but actually plays quite a different role. You would find that the Foreign Service could really become a professional Foreign Service with a real technical role to play. As long as there is another foreign policy coterie in the White House, then for all practical purposes the only solution to that is to have the Secretary of State always be the President's best friend. Then your only job becomes to

convince the Secretary to depend on the Foreign Service and not on a closed circle of confidants.

Q: Bob, many thanks for a useful and enlightening interview.

End of interview